

PROJECT SUMMARY

SNC Reference Number

(enter if previously
assigned)

County: Mono

Applicant: American Land Conservancy

Project Title: Cinnamon Ranch Easement Acquisition

PROJECT GOAL

Acquire a permanent conservation easement on 602-acre Cinnamon Ranch.

PROJECT SCOPE

This project will secure a conservation easement on the Cinnamon Ranch in Mono County, California. American Land Conservancy (ALC) is requesting \$700,000 from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to be applied in full to the purchase price of the conservation easement.

Cinnamon Ranch is an historic alfalfa hay ranch located in the heart of Hammil Valley along the western base of the White Mountains. This 602-acre ranch was the first agricultural operation in Mono County's "Tri-Valley" area -- comprised of Benton, Hammil, and Chalfant Valleys. Richard and Barbara Moss have owned and operated the ranch since 1971, with nearly all of its 503 irrigatable acres rated as prime farmland by NRCS. Irrigation is primarily enabled by surface water from Birch, Middle Canyon, and Pellesier Creeks.

The desired outcome of this project is a conservation easement on Cinnamon Ranch. An easement would encourage continued agricultural productivity by limiting residential and commercial development to a compact, pre-designated building envelope, and away from the property's fertile soils. Care is being taken to allow for flexible land-use options within this envelope.

An easement would also preserve important wildlife habitat. Deer, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, waterfowl, upland birds, and raptors are but a cross-section of the numerous species found on the ranch. Furthermore, riparian habitat provided by the creeks crossing through the ranch would be protected by this easement.

Cinnamon Ranch provides views of the dramatic White Mountains to the east and the jagged edge of the Sierra Nevada Range to the west, all contrasted by the verdant fields of the ranch. These picturesque viewsheds translate into tourism dollars, especially from visitors travelling along Highway 6.

This project directly supports the goals of Mono County's General Plan, which identifies the protection of agriculture, natural/wildlife habitat, and open space as important planning goals. Further, the Plan directs the County to "Preserve the agricultural character of the Hammil Valley," specifically encouraging the use of conservation easements "to protect the land as open space and/or agricultural use."

The appraised value of the easement is \$1,400,000. A grant of \$700,000 from Sierra Nevada Conservancy would be applied in full to purchase the easement with the balance coming from other funding sources. Additional estimated costs of \$180,000 for salary, travel, legal, and a monitoring endowment will be provided by ALC and are already committed to the project.

The major tasks necessary to complete the project include raising funds to purchase the easement, negotiating easement terms, and conducting transactional due diligence through easement close. ALC is responsible for all tasks and will also ensure that the easement will be monitored and enforced into perpetuity. To date, ALC has secured an appraisal of the easement and negotiated and met with the landowner and possible funders. Between September 2008 and May, 2009 ALC will submit funding proposals, which, in addition to this application, include proposals to the NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and the CA Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservancy Program. Both of these funders know the project and have invited funding applications.

This project fits into ALC's larger Great Basin Program which aims to protect working ranches in the Eastern Sierra and Nevada.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- Larry Freilich, Executive Director, Eastern Sierra Land Trust
- Tim Alpers, Inland Aquaculture Group, LLC (Alpers Trout)
- Dale Miller, Mac's Sporting Goods
- George Milovich, Agricultural Commissioner, Inyo and Mono Counties

SNC PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Baseline inventory completed Phase 1 Environmental Analysis completed	June, 2009
Final easement terms determined	July, 2009
Final legal review completed	October, 2009
Submit 6-mo progress report	November, 2009
Easement transaction closed and recorded Easement management responsibilities begin	January 2010
Submit final (project completion) report	March, 2010

SNC PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Conservation Easement Acquisition (total value: \$1,400,000 per appraisal)	\$700,000
SNC GRANT TOTAL	\$700,000